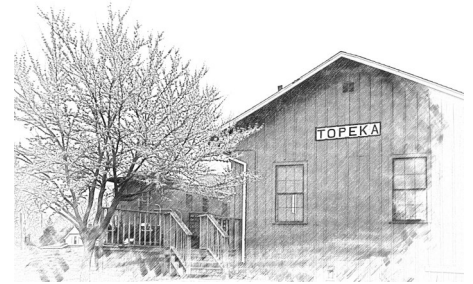




Mile 146

Winter - 2017



Volume 10

Topeka Area Historical Society

Number 1

“Those Flying Emmert Boys....!”

The Wabash Railroad that ran through Topeka is said to have served as “an iron compass” in the early days of aviation. Before radar and flight instruments, hearing those daredevil pilots fly overhead captured the imagination and sparked a passion in Howard and his older brother Oscar “Roy” Emmert. Writing for Topeka Historical Society’s *Celebrating a Century 1893-1993*, Howard recalled the first airmail planes flying over the family farm just southeast of Topeka in the mid-1920s. “Flying between a low cloud and the ground, the 12-cylinder 450 horsepower engines gave a decibel-surge thrill like no other!” The Emmert brothers were hooked and determined to learn to fly.

By 1928 both Roy and Howard were out of high school and working at Kemp Ford in Topeka. With what money they could scrape together they started taking flying lessons at what is now Smith Field in Ft. Wayne. Over the next year they regularly made the car trip with Charles Winebrenner of Ligonier, no doubt all the while discussing the glorious things they were learning. Their training was done in a Waco biplane powered by a Curtiss OX-5 engine. The Curtiss OX-5 was developed by Glenn Curtiss and has the distinction of being the first V-8 aircraft engine to be mass produced in the United States. Howard made his first solo flight in August of 1929.



Thanks to Howard Emmert piloting the Emmert Brothers’ Waco 10 biplane, and with his good friend Maurice Moseman operating the camera, we have this bird’s-eye view of Topeka looking southeast.

The following April the brothers started flying passengers, ...“lots of them” according to Howard, in the year-old Waco 10 they had purchased (believed to be the first plane licensed in LaGrange County) “We charged \$3.00 a person, with two people per trip, for a 15-minute ride,” Howard wrote. Among their first passengers were their parents John (THS Class of 1902) & Grace Plank Emmert. Presumably the boys didn’t charge their parents for the thrill ride.



the landowner’s family members who had the courage to get onboard. We don’t know if parachutes were also provided “in the unlikely event that....” The first field to be used was owned by Elva & Nellie Yoder who lived a mile and a half north of Topeka.

Continued on page 2

In this Issue

- Those Flying Emmert Boys
- Track Notes
- The Mile 146 Quiz
- The Hawpach History Detective:



the Lerner Theater. It was in Elkhart in 1939 that he met Vivian Herrold who was 10 years his junior. They were married in Elkhart on May 9, 1943. At the time of their marriage both were working for Conn where Roy started out testing horns and then navigational equipment. The couple would have three sons; David, Mark, and Phillip.

"Roy never had a lesson," Vivian said in a January 27, 1991, Elkhart Truth news article, "but he was a natural musician." He was an accom-

The Great Depression caught up with their flying enterprise. By late 1931, the price of rides was lowered to a dollar. However, the Topeka Area Historical Society has a photograph taken on a Sunday afternoon in November of 1931, where 36 passengers soared in the heavens over a three-hour span with Howard and Roy. A farm field owned by Dana Hartzler, just southwest of Topeka, with ample room for both passenger and spectator parking, became the temporary runway.

In his article entitled "In the Air", Howard recounts numerous antidotes of their flying exploits. There was the day when two young Ford executives from Detroit wanted to impress an attractive office girl in the Ligonier Ford dealership. Unfortunately, all the "buzzing" and steep banking turns over Ligonier became too much of the young executive who promptly became air sick and "lost his breakfast". We don't know if the office girl was impressed, but Howard wasn't because he had to clean the plane inside and out.

While Roy and Howard most likely were the first Topeka natives to own an airplane, they were not the first Topeka pilots. That distinction belongs to Nolan Loy (THS Class of 1911) and Ford Bender (THS Class of 1913). Loy and Bender both flew military planes in World War I. Unfortunately we know nothing further of the pair's military aviation service.

The propeller from Howard and Roy's plane is on display at the Topeka Area Historical Society's Depot Museum along with a model of the plane and other memorabilia. Additional items are on display at the Fort Wayne International Airport.

Roy, who was the oldest of the Emmert children, was born on April 18, 1909. By the age of 16 Roy was a chorister at the Maple Grove Mennonite Church in Topeka where his parents were members. Sometime after graduating from Wawaka High School in 1927, he moved to Elkhart to play in the pit orchestra for vaudeville shows at

plished musician indeed playing for various dance bands from 1940 to 1968, a charter member of the Elkhart Symphony Orchestra, a member of the South Bend Symphony Orchestra and a life member of the Musicians Union.

A2 THE TRUTH, SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 1991



Playing the Atheneum Room

Bobby Wear is at the drums in this 1947 picture of the Bobby Wear Band in the Atheneum Room of Hotel Elkhart. Vocalist Frankie Plummer (with baton) is standing while the saxes (from left) are Harold Wentzel, Don Van Doren, Leo Starr and Jim Super. On the trombone (standing left) is Roy Emmert and next to him (from left) are trumpeters Ernie Kenaga and Ed Forrest. Bill Miller is at the piano and Marion Fuller is on bass.

He also had a flair for the mechanical. In 1958 he opened Roy's Auto Tune Company which he operated until his retirement in 1981. "He had the ear," Vivian told the Elkhart Truth reporter about her husband's ability to listen to an engine and diagnose the problem. At the time of his death on May 22, 1985, at the age of 76, Emmert maintained and restored antique automobiles at the Ruthmere Museum.

Howard was born August 13, 1910. From an early age he had a fascination for cars and airplanes, and he received his private pilot's license on July 1, 1930, just prior to his 20th birthday. This ushered in a lifelong love of flying. He was a lifetime member of the OX5 Aviation Pioneers.

He was married in Howe on June 6, 1937, to Edith Gwendolyn Yunker. Howard and Gwen had two children, Rev. Dr. John Emmert and Marcella (Marcy) Emmert Lawless.

Answers:
1) Oscar
2) August of 1929
3) Elva & Nellie Yoder
4) White Whitehead
5) Bessie Oesch

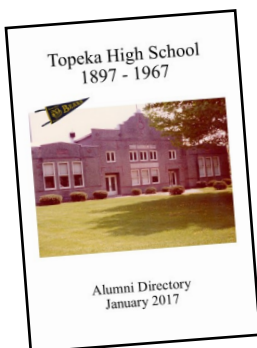


Final Edition of the:

THS Alumni Directory

The final addition of the *THS Alumni Directory*, which will include numerous class photos, is currently being assembled and should be off the press in plenty of time for this final reunion.

Plans are currently in the works for the final reunion of the Topeka High School Alumni Association. The date of the reunion has been set for Saturday, June 17, 2017, at the Topeka Elementary School. Former graduates and students are being encouraged to make every effort to attend.



The first class to graduate from Topeka High School in 1897 had 10 members, 6 girls and 4 boys. The final class was in 1967 with 18 members, 14 girls and 4 boys. Though they were the last graduating class to attend THS, the 1967 class was already a part of the Westview School Corporation as a result of the consolidation with Shipshewana.

Coming Events:

March 21, 2017 Roger & Pat Emmert Franke
Tracing their Roots:
"The Emmert Family"

May 16, 2017 TBA

June 17, 2017 THS Alumni Banquet
(noon) Topeka Elementary School

Topeka Area Historical Society Meetings are held
at the Topeka Branch Library - 6:30 PM
Everyone is welcome

Visit us online at: www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

The Mile 146 Quiz:

1. What was Roy Emmert's first name?
2. When did Howard Emmert make his first sole flight ?
3. Who owned the farm field that the Emmert brother used as their first landing strip?
4. Who was Topeka's "grand little pitcher" in 1942?
5. Who set the type for the Topeka Journal?



Continued from page 2

After working for the Kempp family in Topeka and Detroit, Emmert's primary career was with the Skelgas division of Skelly Oil Company. He held a variety of positions at various locations: Topeka, Sturgis, MI, and Jackson, MI, and later in both Fort Wayne and Warsaw.

Following retiring in 1972, He and Gwen built a retirement home in Howe where they lived for the next 20 years. During that time he was an active member of the Howe United Methodist Church, the Lions Club and the Indiana Wing of OX5, where he was instrumental in assisting in the establishment of the Air Museum at Baer Field in Fort Wayne. In 1992 the Emmerts moved to Tulsa, OK, to be near their daughter. Gwen died in 2001, Howard on July 4, 2002. Both were buried in the Riverside Cemetery in Howe, Indiana.

Reflecting on his flying days Howard wrote, "Was I glad I had learned to be one of those 'dare-devil' pilots!"

HG

Topeka Area Historical Society
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571

www.topekahistoricalsociety.com

2017 Board of Directors

Harold D. Gingerich, President
Doris Haggard, Vice President
Erin Schwartz, Secretary
Janice Gingerich, Treasurer
Keith Bobeck, Director
Michael Zehr, Director
Bryan McCoy, Director



The Hawpatch History Detective

TOPEKA JOURNAL

VOLUME XXXVI NUMBER 48

TOPEKA, INDIANA THURSDAY AUG. 6, 1942

ONE DOLLAR PER YEAR

Topeka Wins Soft Ball Tournament

Wednesday morning about three fourths of the population of Topeka and the surrounding community awoke and discovered they were suffering either from sprained voices, sore hands or strained eyes. Why? Because Tuesday evening they had witnessed right here on the Topeka diamond what Vic Palmer of Elkhart, the sectional softball chairman, stated was the best game he had seen all season. The team and fans were keyed for this final championship game and while hopeful, realized Topeka was up against a worthy foe in the LaGrange Grants. Topeka won 3 to 2 in 15 innings of the most thrilling softball game ever played on the Topeka diamond.

Heroes, of course we had them. Too much praise cannot be given "Whitie" Whitehead, the grand little pitcher, who held LaGrange to 4 hits, struck out 19 and did not walk a man, and shortstop Tabby Holden, after making a bad error on the first hitball of the game later came thru with two sensational fielding plays and did some fancy base running. Bob Sutton's great throw from the outfield to Don Fought to cut down a runner at 3rd base. George Curtis who has

been considered a weak hitter all season getting a home run, double, single and 2 walks practically single handed keeping Topeka in the ball game. Also the hundreds of loyal "fans" hence because they stuck with the team and cheered and encouraged.

"Red" Hendricks home on furlough surely rates the "distinguished service medal" for his rooting. The team wishes to thank him and all the fans for their support. Reviewing the tournament from the beginning on the opening night Ligonier defeated Wolcottville 10 to 8 and Topeka won from Simpson's of Elkhart 13 to 2. Whitehead did not allow Elkhart a hit but walks and errors scored the 2 runs for Elkhart.

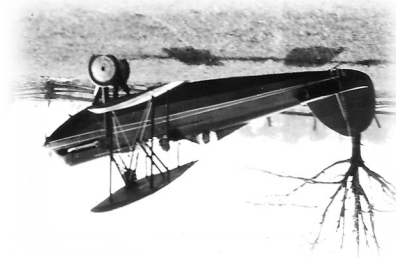
On the second night Chicago Telephone Co. of Elkhart defeated Benton 13 to 2 and LaGrange Grants shut out Ligonier 10 to 0. The last Friday night Topeka won from Emma Conservation Club 13 to 1 and Superiors of Goshen won from Wolf Lake 10 to 5 in 8 innings. This Monday night in the semi finals LaGrange Grants won from Elkhart Chicago Telephone Co. 2 to 1 and Topeka defeated Goshen Superiors 6 to 0. Whitehead allowed Goshen only one hit. Then on Tuesday evening the final championship game Topeka won the thriller 3 to 2 in 15 innings. Topeka now advances to the district tournament in Elkhart playing the Goshen Rubber Mfg Team at 9 p.m. Thursday night August 8th.

Editor's note:

The preceding article (with grammar and misspellings) was transcribed as it appeared on page 4 of the Thursday, August 6, 1942, issue of the *Topeka Journal*. C.W. Mattingly was the editor. For many years Bessie Oesch set the type.

HG

www.topekahistoricalociety.com



Topeka Area Historical Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 33
Topeka, Indiana 46571

